

NORTHBROOK, IL – Congressman Mark Kirk, state Rep. Elaine Nekritz and local leaders joined together today to push for an expansion of the Buffalo Creek Lake County Forest Preserve, an environmental and flood control project for communities along the Des Plaines River. The locally-funded project will cost \$30 million and will trigger an estimated \$57 million in public benefits.

“A partnership between the Lake County Forest Preserve and the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago will result in an additional 200 acres of prairie, 50 acres of wetlands and 525 new trees at the Buffalo Creek Preserve,” Congressman Kirk said. “The project also will expand the reservoir capacity, ensuring that communities along the Des Plaines River don’t have to use sand bags to keep the river in check when heavy rains come. So far, the National Park Service has blocked the expansion based on a technicality. Our communities need this expansion and we are working together in a bipartisan manner to make sure that we reach that goal.”

In 1984, the Lake County Forest Preserve District granted an easement within the new Buffalo Creek Preserve to the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago to build a reservoir for environmental protection, recreation and flood control. Once completed, the Buffalo Creek Reservoir added nature trails and scenic views to the preserve. Thousands of people now visit the reservoir, turning it into a popular place for fishing and bird watching.

In 1993, the Lake County Forest Preserve District made improvements to the Buffalo Creek Preserve, supported by a \$190,000 Land & Water Conservation Fund (L&WCF) grant. The grant helped pay for a very small part of a locally-funded program to build four miles of trails, parking areas, an entrance road, a well hand pump, a prairie restoration area and three foot bridges.

Last year, the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District and the Forest Preserve District agreed to amend a 1984 easement, improving the protected area and expanding the reservoir. The plans for the reservoir were already approved by other parts of the federal government, including the Army Corps of Engineers who support this program to limit environmental and flood damage.

After reviewing the agreement between the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District and the

Forest Preserve District, the Midwest Region of the National Park Service delayed this expansion of the forest preserve stating “the Land & Water Conservation Fund manual states that by law no perpetual easements are allowed to any L&WCF project sites. Therefore, any changes to the Buffalo Creek Forest Preserve would constitute a conversion.”

“Last month, Rep. Nekritz, local mayors and I, along with colleagues in the U.S. House and in the Illinois General Assembly, sent a letter to the Secretary of the Interior outlining the numerous benefits that Cook and Lake counties will receive from this expansion,” Congressman Kirk said. “In discussions I had with Interior Secretary Kempthorne two weeks ago we discussed the important environmental and flood control benefits of the Buffalo Creek project. The Secretary understood the case we presented, giving us hope that the project will be approved in the near future.”

Joining Congressman Kirk and Rep. Nekritz were Lake County Forest Preserve President Bonnie Thomson Carter, Lake County Board Member David Stolman, Long Grove Village President Maria Rodriguez, Mount Prospect Mayor Irvana Wilks, Des Plaines Mayor Tony Arredia, Prospect Heights City Engineer Adam Boeche, Buffalo Grove Village President Elliott Hartstein and Roy Deda with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Last August, Lake and McHenry counties were declared federal disaster areas after the Des Plaines River flooded communities from Gurnee to Des Plaines following severe storms. The floods caused in widespread damage to local homes as well as considerable costs to municipalities for emergency services. In 1986, flooding along the Des Plaines River caused \$35 million in damage to 10,000 homes, requiring the evacuation of 15,000 area residents. The expansion of Buffalo Creek would allow the construction of levies downstream on the Des Plaines River, reducing the impact of flooding to communities in northwest Cook County.